

What Is Claimed:

1. An absorbent article comprising:
an outer cover material;
a liner; and
5 an absorbent structure positioned between the outer cover material and the liner, the absorbent structure including a front portion, a rear portion, and a middle portion, the front portion having a width, the absorbent structure further comprising a pair of opposing lateral flaps folded at least onto the middle portion of the absorbent structure, each of the flaps, when in an unfolded state, extending
10 beyond the width of the front portion, each of the flaps having a width adjacent to the middle portion that is from about 25% to 100% of the width of the middle portion.
2. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the middle portion is narrower than the front portion.
- 15 3. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the middle portion is narrower than the front portion and the back portion.
4. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein each of the flaps has a width adjacent to the middle portion that is from about 33% to 100% of the width of the middle portion.
- 20 5. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein each of the flaps has a width adjacent to the middle portion that is from about 50% to 100% of the width of the middle portion.
6. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the absorbent structure has an hourglass-like shape.
- 25 7. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the absorbent structure defines a length and wherein the lateral flaps extend substantially the entire length of the absorbent structure, the flaps folding onto the front portion, the middle portion, and the rear portion.
8. An absorbent article as defined in claim 7, wherein the middle portion
30 is narrower than the front portion.
9. An absorbent article as defined in claim 7, wherein the middle portion is narrower than the front portion and the back portion.

10. An absorbent article as defined in claim 8, wherein the lateral flaps have a widest section adjacent the middle portion.

11. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the absorbent structure defines a length and wherein the pair of opposing lateral flaps extend only a portion of the length of the absorbent structure adjacent to the middle portion.

12. An absorbent article as defined in claim 11, wherein the lateral flaps are connected to the middle portion and wherein each of the flaps is separated from the front portion by a first slit and separated from the rear portion by a second slit.

13. An absorbent article as defined in claim 12, wherein the absorbent structure defines a longitudinal axis that extends from the front portion to the rear portion, the first slits and the second slits being substantially perpendicular to the longitudinal axis.

14. An absorbent article as defined in claim 12, wherein the absorbent structure defines a longitudinal axis that extends from the front portion to the rear portion, the first slits and the second slits extending generally in a diagonal direction in relation to the longitudinal axis.

15. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the absorbent structure has a generally uniform basis weight when in an unfolded state.

16. An absorbent article as defined in claim 12, wherein the absorbent structure defines a longitudinal axis that extends from the front portion to the rear portion, the first slits and the second slits extending in a non-linear fashion in relation to the longitudinal axis.

17. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the absorbent structure has a non-uniform basis weight when in an unfolded state, the middle portion having a higher basis weight than the front portion and the rear portion.

18. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the absorbent structure has a non-uniform basis weight when in an unfolded state, the lateral flaps having a basis weight greater than the middle portion.

19. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the absorbent structure has a non-uniform basis weight when in an unfolded state, the front portion and the rear portion having a higher basis weight than the middle portion.

20. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the absorbent structure has a non-uniform basis weight when in an unfolded state, the middle portion having a basis weight greater than the lateral flaps.

21. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the absorbent article is one of diapers, child's training pants, feminine care articles, and incontinence articles.

22. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the absorbent structure comprises superabsorbent particles.

23. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the absorbent structure comprises pulp fibers and superabsorbent particles.

24. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the absorbent structure comprises an air formed web.

25. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the absorbent structure has a basis weight of from about 100 gsm to about 2,000 gsm.

26. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein once each of the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion includes areas that have a basis weight that is at least twice the basis weight of the front portion and the rear portion.

27. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein once each of the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion includes areas that have a basis weight that is at least 150% greater than the basis weight of the front portion and the rear portion.

28. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein once each of the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion includes areas that have a basis weight that is at least 3 times the basis weight of the front portion and the rear portion.

29. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the front portion includes a center area and two opposing lateral areas and the rear portion also includes a center area and two opposing lateral areas, and wherein, once each of the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion, the center area of the front portion, and the center area of the rear portion each have a basis weight that is at least 150% greater than the basis weight of the two opposing lateral areas of the front portion and the two opposing lateral areas of the rear portion.

30. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein the front portion includes a center area and two opposing lateral areas and the rear portion also includes a center area and two opposing lateral areas, and wherein, once each of the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion, the center area of the front
5 portion, and the center area of the rear portion each have a basis weight that is at least twice the basis weight of the two opposing lateral areas of the front portion and the two opposing lateral areas of the rear portion.

31. An absorbent article as defined in claim 29, wherein, once each of the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion has a basis weight that is at
10 least 3 times the basis weight of the two opposing lateral areas of the front portion and the two opposing lateral areas of the rear portion, and the center area of the front portion and the center area of the rear portion have a basis weight that is at least twice the basis weight of the two opposing lateral areas of the front portion and the two opposing lateral areas of the rear portion.

15 32. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein once each of the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion comprises two layers of material.

33. An absorbent article as defined in claim 1, wherein once each of the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion comprises three layers of material.

20 34. A method of forming absorbent pads from an absorbent web material comprising:

conveying a strip of the absorbent web material along a machine direction;

25 cutting the absorbent web material to form opposing lateral flaps, the opposing lateral flaps defining a widest portion of the absorbent web material;

folding the opposing lateral flaps onto the absorbent web material;
and

30 cutting the strip of web material in a cross direction into individual absorbent pads, each individual absorbent pad including a front portion, a middle portion, a rear portion, and a pair of opposing lateral flaps, the lateral flaps being folded onto at least the middle portion of the absorbent pad, the lateral flaps having a maximum width of from about 25% to 100% of the width of the middle portion.

35. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the middle portion of the folded absorbent pad is narrower than the front portion.

36. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the middle portion of the folded absorbent pad is narrower than the front portion and the rear portion.

5 37. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the lateral flaps have a maximum width of from about 33% to 100% of the width of the middle portion of the absorbent pad.

38. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the lateral flaps have a maximum width of from about 50% to 100% of the width of the middle portion of
10 the absorbent pad.

39. A method as defined in claim 34, where each absorbent pad defines a length extending from the front portion to the rear portion, the lateral flaps extending substantially the entire length of each pad.

40. A method as defined in claim 39, wherein in order to form the lateral
15 flaps, the absorbent web material is cut generally in the machine direction along each side of the front portion of each absorbent pad and then cut inward toward the middle portion, the absorbent web material also being cut generally in the machine direction along each side of the rear portion of each pad and cut inward toward the middle portion, the flaps remaining connected to the middle portion.

20 41. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the absorbent web material has a substantially uniform basis weight.

42. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the absorbent web material has a non-uniform basis weight, the middle portion of the web material having a higher basis weight than other portions of the absorbent web material, the basis
25 weight changing in the cross direction of the material.

43. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the absorbent web material has a non-uniform basis weight, the lateral flaps having a higher basis weight than the middle portion.

44. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the absorbent web material
30 has a non-uniform basis weight, wherein the front portion and the rear portion have a basis weight higher than the middle portion.

45. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the absorbent web material has a non-uniform basis weight, the middle portion having a higher basis weight than the lateral flaps.

5 46. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the absorbent web material comprises pulp fibers and superabsorbent particles.

47. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the absorbent web material comprises superabsorbent particles.

48. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the absorbent web material comprises a foam.

10 49. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the absorbent web material is air formed.

50. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the absorbent web material has a basis weight of from about 100 gsm to about 2000 gsm.

15 51. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the opposing lateral flaps are folded onto the absorbent web material prior to cutting the strip of web material in a cross direction into individual absorbent pads.

20 52. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein prior to the cutting step, the strip of web material is supplied to a continuous absorbent article in-line manufacturing process, wherein the step of cutting the strip of web material into individual pads is carried out during the in-line manufacture of absorbent articles incorporating the individual absorbent pads therein.

25 53. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein prior to the cutting step, the strip of web material is stored in a form suitable for later delivery to an absorbent article manufacturing process, the strip of web material being cut into individual pads during the in-line manufacture of absorbent articles incorporating the individual absorbent pads therein.

54. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the individual absorbent pads are subsequently incorporated into an absorbent article.

30 55. A method as defined in claim 54, wherein the absorbent articles are one of diapers, child's training pants, feminine care articles, and incontinence articles.

56. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein each individual absorbent pad defines a length, the opposing lateral flaps only extending a portion of the length of the absorbent pads adjacent to the middle portion.

57. A method as defined in claim 56, wherein, in order to form the lateral flaps, the absorbent web material is cut generally in a cross machine direction towards the middle portion of the absorbent pad, the flaps remaining connected to the middle portion.

58. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein once each of the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion includes areas that have a basis weight that is at least twice the basis weight of the front portion and the rear portion.

59. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein once each of the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion includes areas that have a basis weight that is at least 150% greater than the basis weight of the front portion and the rear portion.

60. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein once each of the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion includes areas that have a basis weight that is at least 3 times the basis weight of the front portion and the rear portion.

61. A method as defined in claim 34, wherein the front portion includes a center area and two opposing lateral areas and the rear portion also includes a center area and two opposing lateral areas, and wherein, once each of the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion, the center area of the front portion, and the center area of the rear portion each comprise at least two layers of material while the two opposing lateral areas of the front portion and the two opposing lateral areas of the rear portion comprise only a single layer of material.

62. A method as defined in claim 61, wherein, once each of the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion comprises three layers of material, and the center area of the front portion and the center area of the rear portion comprise two layers of material.

63. An absorbent article comprising:
an outer cover material;
a liner; and
an absorbent structure including a front portion, a middle portion, and a rear portion, the middle portion being narrower than the front portion, the

absorbent structure further comprising a pair of opposing lateral flaps extending substantially the entire length of the absorbent structure, the lateral flaps being connected to the middle portion and being separated from the front portion by a first pair of opposing slits and from the rear portion by a second pair of opposing
5 slits, the lateral flaps being folded onto the front portion, the middle portion, and the rear portion of the absorbent structure.

64. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the middle portion is narrower than the rear portion.

65. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the lateral flaps
10 have a width adjacent the middle portion that is from about 25% to 100% of the width of the middle portion.

66. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the lateral flaps have a width adjacent the middle portion that is from about 33% to 100% of the width of the middle portion.

15 67. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the lateral flaps have a width adjacent the middle portion that is from about 50% to 100% of the width of the middle portion.

68. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the first pair of opposing slits generally extend in the lengthwise direction along the front portion
20 and then are directed inwards toward the middle portion, and wherein the second pair of opposing slits generally extend in the lengthwise direction along the rear portion and then are directed inward toward the middle portion.

69. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the lateral flaps include thin sections adjacent to the front portion and the rear portion and include a
25 widest section adjacent the middle portion.

70. An absorbent article as defined in claim 69, wherein the absorbent structure has a rectangular shape when in an unfolded state.

71. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the absorbent structure in an unfolded state has a uniform basis weight, the basis weight being
30 from about 100 gsm to about 2000 gsm.

72. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the absorbent article is one of diapers, child's training pants, feminine care articles, and incontinence articles.

73. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the absorbent structure comprises superabsorbent particles.

74. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the absorbent structure comprises pulp fibers and superabsorbent particles.

5 75. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the absorbent structure comprises an air formed web.

76. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the front portion includes a center area and two opposing lateral areas and the rear portion also includes a center area and two opposing lateral areas, and wherein, once each of
10 the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion, the center area of the front portion, and the center area of the rear portion each comprise at least two layers of material while the two opposing lateral areas of the front portion and the two opposing lateral areas of the rear portion comprise only a single layer of material.

77. An absorbent article as defined in claim 76, wherein, once each of
15 the lateral flaps have been folded, the middle portion comprises at least three layers of material.

78. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the absorbent structure is formed from an absorbent web having a substantially uniform basis weight prior to the folding of the lateral flaps.

20 79. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the absorbent structure is formed from an absorbent web having a non-uniform basis weight, the middle portion having a basis weight higher than the basis weight of the lateral flaps prior to folding the lateral flaps.

80. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the absorbent
25 structure is formed from an absorbent web having a non-uniform basis weight, the lateral flaps having a basis weight greater than the middle portion prior to the folding of the lateral flaps.

81. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the absorbent
30 structure is formed from an absorbent web having a non-uniform basis weight when in an unfolded state, the middle portion having a higher basis weight than the front portion and the rear portion.

82. An absorbent article as defined in claim 63, wherein the absorbent structure is formed from an absorbent web having a non-uniform basis weight

when in an unfolded state, the front portion and the rear portion having a higher basis weight than the middle portion.